JAMES HALLIDAY JUST WANTS EVERYONE TO PLAY

MASTER OF THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSE

By **Stephanie Steinbrenner**

James Halliday, creator of the OASIS, a virtual reality wonderworld, is a game designer and tech visionary who made an unparalleled impact on the industries of gaming, entertainment, and technology; many might argue that Halliday, together with his former business partner Ogden Morrow, combined all of these industries into one enormous digital playground.

But long before changing the landscape of virtual reality, and the way people interact, James Halliday was a gangly, gaming-obsessed teenager from Middletown, Ohio.

It was at Middletown High School where he met his best friend Ogden Morrow. The two of them bonded over a love of films and video games. Morrow and Halliday spent their days after school designing games in Morrow's basement. Shortly after graduating high school, the two decided to start their own video game company, Gregarious Games.

It began with their first game, Anorak's Quest, which they sold by promoting it on the back of computer magazines. They spent years developing this game in Morrow's basement, but within six months, Anorak's Quest became a national bestseller.

And from there, the small company took the videogame industry by storm, releasing a series of bestselling action and adventure games, all using a groundbreaking first-person graphics engine created by Halliday. Gregarious Games set a new standard for immersive gaming.

It wasn't until decades later that Halliday would make VR not just a gaming experience, but a lifestyle.

Many of the Missing Millions won't remember that there was a time when it looked like Virtual Reality would go the way of Laserdisc, Pogs, and Google Glass. In the 2020's, the virtual age was a flame that had burned fast and bright, then gone out just as quickly. VR was dead. Until James Halliday breathed new life into it.

With the release of the OASIS, the massive multiplayer online game, James Halliday did what many game designers tried at and failed. He created a world people wanted to live in. He's the man who changed the real world by creating a virtual one.

The OASIS began as a game not unlike EA's Third Life or Activision's Virtual Sandbox. But it evolved into something far larger, far greater than a gaming platform. It became a fully realized, completely immersive, globally networked virtual reality platform that combines interactive gaming with education, online shopping, simulated travel, virtual medical treatment and psychotherapy, as well as both passive and interactive entertainment.

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The OASIS is, in its simplest form, a universe. It inhabits worlds that can be explored, people you can interact with, and even an education and commerce system. Anyone with an IOI Haptic Vizor can transport themselves to the top of the Eiffel Tower or the bottom of the ocean to explore the Titanic. You can spend time with loved ones across the globe or jump to a simulated version of Ancient Rome in an instant. It is truly an endless virtual world beyond even your most complex dreams.

For gamers, there's a player vs. player world to embark on, as long as you have the guts and skills to survive. If you don't, you risk losing in-world credits, weapons, inventory, and even your clothes.

Anyone who doesn't want to lose the clothes off their back can stick to the Non-PVP zones, of which there are many. Vacation planets are exactly as they sound. They contain beaches, ski resorts, and exotic destinations all within virtual miles of each other. You can also try your luck on the Gambling Planet or test your skills on the DIY planet.

Users of the OASIS will notice one prevalent element of the virtual world: it is infused with Halliday's reverent love of 80's pop culture. You can engage in the cinematic worlds of that decade. Explore any of the plethora of vividly designed sci-fi galaxies, or hit 88-MPH in Doc Brown's Delorean from Back to the Future. There's even a cyberpunk-themed world that's a clear homage to cult sci-fi classic Blade Runner, where it's always nighttime and the skies are layered with a continuous stream of flying vehicles whirring through the vertical cityscapes.

Whatever your interests are, the OASIS has it. And James Halliday has made that a reality, no matter how virtual of a reality it is. With over 3 billion "inhabitants" and counting, the question isn't whether you're spending time in the virtual world, but whether there's anything left worth doing in the real world.

In its infancy, Gregarious Games began simply as a game company, but Halliday's vision always included more than just games; he wanted a world he could play in, a world much like our own but better, more vibrant, easier to navigate, and more fun. Halliday made that a reality with the OASIS.